

OPERATOR CERTIFICATION

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. HOW CAN I GET CERTIFIED?

There are three major things that you must do to get certified.

- You must take courses in wastewater treatment plant operations. The number and difficulty depend on the certificate grade you want.
- You must pass a written exam. Wastewater treatment plant operator certification exams are given twice each year, once in early April and once in early October. Exams for all five grades are given at the same time at several locations throughout the state. To take an exam, you must show that you meet the minimum educational requirements and submit a fee and application.
- You must meet experience requirements and submit a fee and an application for a certificate. Your experience must be in the operation of a wastewater treatment plant with a valid operator certificate or operator-in-training certificate. You may submit your application for a certificate up to four years after you pass the written exam.

2. HOW CAN I GET A JOB AS A WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANT OPERATOR?

To work in a public wastewater treatment plant or a private wastewater treatment plant regulated by the PUC, you must have a valid wastewater treatment plant operator certificate or an operator-in-training certificate. See Question 1 for details. If you have no experience as an operator, you must get an Operator-in-Training (OIT) Certificate. See Question 4 on how to do that. The owners of the plant do the hiring of operators, usually a city, and county or special district. You need to contact them to see if there are any jobs available. Other potential sources of job listings are local newspapers local sections of the California Water Environment Association.

3. WHAT IS THE OFFICE OF OPERATOR CERTIFICATION (OOC)?

The OOC administers the Wastewater Treatment Plant Operator Certification Program to provide certificates for operators. The OOC conducts the exams required by the regulations, including developing the exam questions, processing applications, printing and mailing the certificates, mailing out renewal notices, and processing renewal applications. Along with these major duties, OOC does other work including answering questions, updating regulations, investigating violations of the law and regulations by certified operators, and classifying wastewater treatment plants.

4. HOW MUCH SUPERVISION DOES AN OPERATOR-IN-TRAINING (OIT) NEED?

The regulations require that an OIT be under the direct supervision of an operator with a certificate of equal or higher grade. Direct supervision means the oversight and inspection of the OIT's work by the supervisor without an intervening person. An OIT cannot work as the only operator at a plant during swing, late night or weekend shifts. The OIT must have ready access to the supervising operator, so that if the OIT has any doubt about what to do they can ask. On the other hand, the supervising operator need not be the shift supervisor. The regulations only require a certified operator of equal or higher grade. Common sense indicates a well-experienced operator would be the best mentor for an OIT.

5. WHERE CAN I GET WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANT OPERATOR TRAINING?

Many State University campuses and Community Colleges offer training. There are also non-profit organizations and for-profit organizations that also offer training. Please be aware that the law only allows us to recognize training given by colleges and universities and by professional associations or other non-profit private or public agencies as meeting the educational requirements for certification

6. WHEN ARE APPLICATIONS DUE FOR EXAMINATIONS?

Our regulations list the exam application final filing dates. They are February 1 for exams given in April and August 1 for exams given in October. Your complete application package, including fee, must be postmarked no later than the final filing date. Our regulations allow for no exceptions. On the other hand, you may submit your application as early as you like.

7. DO YOU NEED A CERTIFICATE TO WORK AT A PLANT?

The law requires you to have a certificate to work as an operator at a publicly owned wastewater treatment plant or a privately owned plant regulated by the PUC. You do not need a certificate to work as something other than an operator at a wastewater treatment plant, (e.g., a laboratory technician). You do not need a certificate to work as an operator at a privately owned plant not regulated by the PUC. An example is an industrial wastewater treatment plant owned by a private industry.

8. WHEN IS THE NEXT EXAM?

Exams are given in April and October each year. Tests for all grades are given each time. The following dates have been set:

April 6, 2002
October 5, 2002
April 5, 2003
October 4, 2003
April 3, 2004
October 2, 2004

Exams begin on the scheduled date at 9:00a.m. Examinees must show the notice card and photo identification. No books, notes or references are allowed at the exam site. Hand calculators may be used. Alphanumeric and programmable calculators are not allowed.

9. HOW LONG ARE CERTIFICATES VALID?

Certificates must be renewed every two years. OOC will send you a renewal notice. You must submit an application for renewal and a fee. It must be postmarked before the expiration date. You will receive a new certificate about 30 days later. Renewal is very important. It is illegal to work as an operator with an expired certificate. If you move, please give us your new address so you will receive a renewal notice. Whether or not you receive a renewal notice, it is your responsibility to submit your application for renewal before the expiration date. You do not have to take the examination again.

Remember - there is no grace period for an expired certificate. Once it expires, it is no longer valid and you cannot work as an operator.

10. WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN DRINKING WATER AND WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANT OPERATOR CERTIFICATION?

Drinking water operator certification is separate from wastewater operator certification. Drinking water treatment plant operator certification is required to work as an operator in a treatment plant that produces water for human consumption in homes and businesses. Wastewater treatment plant operator certification is required to work as an operator in a treatment plant that receives and treats wastewater from homes and businesses. The Department of Health Services administers the water treatment plant operator certification program. They take applications, give exams and issue certificates on applicants who meet their requirements. The drinking water treatment plant operator certification program may be reached at:

Department of Health Services
Office of Drinking Water
Certification Unit
PO Box 942732
Sacramento, CA 94234-7320
(916) 327-1140